

Nimuendajá: The Eastern Timbira

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302 are blamed if he should go about unpainted for a considerable period. "So-and-so's sister," gossips will say, "does not look out a bit for her brother! Just look! He has not a particle of urucú on his body!"

[413] Since the preparation of urucú reddens one's hands in any case, the coarser ornamentation on the body is executed with the fingers and palms, little rods being reserved for the fine red lines of the face paint. Stamps and painting-forks are never used in this connection.

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302 These devices are employed however with the black rubber pigment, which is prepared from the latex of a low steppe tree (*Sapium* sp.). A branch is generally hacked off and barked at home. The juice (arə'mhök) oozing out of the bast is gathered into a gourd bowl, where it may be immediately mixed with powdered charcoal. Alternatively, the pure latex may be painted on the surface, the powder being rubbed in subsequently. Paint of this type often remains visible for a week, and one rarely sees a Timbira without at least some traces of it. Fróes Abreu²² has described this pigment, whereas Snethlage ignores it, obviously taking all black paint to be genipa.

Genipa, though used very rarely, is obligatory at certain ceremonies. The apple-like fruits of the genipa tree (*portia*; *Genipa americana*) are gathered and bisected, then the halves are put into the fire with the plane of bisection on top. As soon as they are heated, one crushes the core with a little rod so that the juice accumulates in the rind, and applies it with a little cotton at the end of a stick. At first the effect remains colorless, but after a few hours the paint turns blackish blue, persisting for over two weeks on unexposed skin. Snethlage mistakenly reports that the stem of the shrub provides the pigment and that there is an admixture of a fine oil.²³

Only on a single occasion—the terminal solemnity of the final initiation phase—have I been able to observe the use of the yellow pigment derived from the urucú root for bodily decoration. On the other hand, it is applied more than others to the ornamentation of pouches and mats of bury bast.

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[502] The ceremonial combs and the cotton wristlets of the girl associates, as well as the anterior surfaces of earplugs, are colored with white clay. The latter have black and red designs on the white background. White clay I have seen applied as body paint only at the ceremony after the return of a girls' collecting expedition into the steppe and at the hōwa celebration (p. 63).

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[856] The black rubber and the red urucú paint are applied in everyday life, either each by itself for a complete coating or in combination; but complex designs are only executed on special occasions. The ordinary painting is that described by Snethlage: on the front and the back of the body, on the right and the left side, there is a broad vertical stripe in black, with a red one in the middle. The hands and feet are never painted black, but invariably red. The face paint usually comprises vertical red strokes across the forehead, bridge of the nose, mouth, and chin; or across the forehead, eyes, and cheeks; likewise horizontal lines at the corners of the eyes and mouth. The older men do not paint at all after the day of their last log race, nor do old women decorate themselves in this way. Little children are most frequently painted black all over, a procedure supposed to promote their growth.

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531 The Canella painting outfit is comparatively multiform (pl. 14). In addition to the above-mentioned little rods and the brushes made of a cotton wad on a stick,

²² Fróes Abreu, *Terra das Palmeiras*, 183.

²³ Snethlage, *Nordostbras. Ind.*, 140.

moieties; or that their office dates back to a time when these two types of dual division coincided.

Exit from the age class.—When retiring, the kukrꞑ'tkama, men about fifty years old, whose cycle was completed in about 1903, had dwindled to a membership of eight. Their leaders, as well as the deputy instructor, had long been dead, and the class as a unit played only a subordinate social part: meetings were rare and hardly ever fully attended in the proper site of the plaza; and there was little participation in log races. On the other hand, some of them who enjoyed a certain prestige almost regularly appeared in the council. Nevertheless they had by no means forgotten their kukrꞑ'tkama affiliation.

When the pepyꞑ festival of 1932 closed the initiation of the pōhjtíkama, the boys (kra'tíkama) entering on the northeast side of the plaza, the kukrꞑ'tkama yielded their place to the advancing kapranpōtíkama. Ten days after the festival all the survivors once more assembled in decorative paint and grass costume in order to run their last log race, in which eastern and western age classes were pitted against each other. Subsequently they did not appear jointly except in the council, with the numerically insignificant survivors of two older classes.

Economic role.—Compared with their socioceremonial and sportive importance, the economic activities of the age classes are quite subordinate. No class as such owns any property; even the place of assembly into which the vꞑ'te's house is transformed belongs exclusively to her mother. At the opening of a vꞑ'te' season the members of a class must humbly ask for this woman's permission before starting their performances there. However, there are two occasions on which the classes engage in economic labors, though not in systematic fashion.

In the first place, they build houses for persons otherwise engaged in matters of public concern. Thus, the two junior classes erected the dwelling of a woman whose husband was a tribal delegate in the state capital. Further, even without such compelling motive the class will help a fellow member put up his house. In 1935 I witnessed the hurried erection of a house by the pōhjtíkama, whose deputy instructor's wife was looking forward to her delivery in the near future.

Secondly, age classes assist in harvesting. Since farming is growing in importance every year, the classes play an ever larger part at crop gathering, especially at the anciently nonexistent rice harvest. For meteorological reasons it is essential to harvest this crop as expeditiously as possible; though the prospective beneficiary cannot afford to abandon his crop at this time, he is often expected to attend the commencement of a major festival in the village. For several years it has been customary not to begin the great celebrations before the garnering of the rice, and to obviate delay for the whole settlement, the age classes then help those who are behind schedule. Whoever requires such aid appeals to the councilors to send him the junior age class of his own class moiety. The council decides as to the possibility of such assistance, for the class may already have been requisitioned for other tasks, and communicates the decision to two class leaders. In case of an affirmative reply the young men as a body appear at the appropriate site, for occasional dances accompanied by a number of girls of their own age. Rarely does the class receive any remuneration, consisting in that case of a small share of the crop, which the leaders subsequently arrange to have prepared for all members. As a rule the beneficiary merely feeds her assistants, who, to be sure, by no means overexert themselves, dawdling to such an extent that I was sometimes puzzled to know whether their collaboration was worth while. However, toward the end of the rice harvest they are constantly occupied.

126 *University of California Publications in Am. Arch. and Ethn.*

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After the husband's death the widow and her children are shielded from want by her brothers and sisters. A widower normally returns to his mother's house. He is really the one more deserving of pity, especially after decades of wedlock, when he is too old to remarry. Accordingly, two old widowers with adult daughters did not take the trouble to move to their matrilineal home, but for the rest of their lifetime remained with their girls. On the other hand, young widowers who contemplate remarriage leave the house of the deceased a few days after the death even if there should be issue. However, father and children visit each other, the former occasionally bringing the youngsters a gift consisting of victuals and in turn being entertained by them.

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When a man moves into his mother-in-law's home, his social position alters only with reference to this new relationship to the inmates of the house and to his age class in so far as he ceases to sleep with the bachelors in the plaza. Otherwise his social activities hardly suffer any change; of the many social units with which he is affiliated only the family takes cognizance of the cleavage between married and single men.

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Strictly speaking, a husband cannot be said to "move" from his maternal to his mother-in-law's home; he rather becomes a member of two households simultaneously, and I have always had the impression that he feels the bond with his mother's house as far closer than with his wife's. This is quite natural since the former is indestructible, while the latter may be dissolved any day. For example, a married man continues to turn over part of his game to his mother's household or has his wife do so. Either alone or in the company of his wife he will often spend a part of the day with his mother, who prepares food for both spouses. Usually a man also keeps part of his personal belongings at his mother's—if for no other reason, in order to preserve them from encroachments by his brothers-in-law. Further, as indicated above, a man who falls seriously ill goes back to his mother's, usually with his wife, to remain there till his recovery. If it is at all possible, a Timbira dies at his mother's house, where the corpse is invariably laid out.

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At his mother's a man always is respected and decisively influences his sister's children, for whose support he is in part responsible in an emergency. His role in a niece's marriage has been noted; anciently, a nephew was his preordained companion in a raid against enemies and preceded him in an attack.

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After the official council session and the subsequent chat in the plaza, that is, about 7:30 P.M., the dignitaries and their male auditors by no means depart straightaway to their wives, each rather regularly betaking himself to his matrilineal home, where he is an expected guest at that hour. As soon as he has seated himself there on a bed, his mother, sister, or niece serves him some food that has always been previously prepared for him. Not until he has eaten and uttered his opinion on family affairs does he leave for his wife's home.

MOURNING

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Whenever a married Indian goes on a protracted journey—say, a begging jaunt to one of the coastal state capitals—his wife goes into a mourner's seclusion until his return. This retreat differs from that customary after a death only through the lack of lamentation and its possibly much greater duration. The woman ceases to cut her hair and to paint herself, puts on no decorative object, does not appear publicly, holds conversation only with her house mates, and rarely leaves her platform bed. Kentapí thus mourned over her absent husband from the beginning of August, 1930, until the beginning of April, 1931. Snr. Marcellino Miranda, the

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782 wakukrá iykapeña." That is, approximately: "Grandfather! Give me a child so that I may be able to eat with him." Then the suppliant spreads the urneti on the inside of her thighs.

Kentapí did not take that much trouble. One morning she was sitting at home against the wall, eating some food from a gourd bowl, while the sun was shining in at the door, directly in front of her feet. She set down her bowl, stretched out both palms horizontally toward the sun, like a begging child, and without getting up said in a low tone: "pa'pám! iymá iykra ñongō! pa'pám iykapré', marwa'té iykri napá. Ka, iykapréne iymá iykrareñongō, vamé iypa!" ("Our Father! Give me a child! Our Father, take pity on me, I am sitting here alone, eating. You, pity me, give me a child to eat with me!") On my request she subsequently repeated the words. "I wonder whether he will listen to your prayer?" I asked. "Surely," she answered, "look at Iromkré [Kentapí's younger sister], she also invoked him and is already pregnant." However, it was three years before Kentapí's prayer was fulfilled.

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847 It is a striking fact that the girls of this tribe never have children before, and only several years after marriage. This is regarded as normal by the Indians themselves, and the above-mentioned Iromkré, who conceived immediately after marriage, was considered exceptional. She was fifteen as a primipara, and her mother told me that she was really too young to bear children. Abortives, if used at all, are exceptional; nor, in my opinion, can the means employed to prevent menstruation be responsible for the lateness of pregnancy in the light of the earliness of sexual intercourse. For this purpose a girl will seat herself on a steppe tree the Neobrazilians call pau pombo (*Tapirira* sp. ?) or drink the infusion of the scraped bark of pau candeia (*Cassia* sp.), which is also considered an abortive.

In any case Snethlage probably underestimates the age of mothers in setting that of Ramkō'kamekra girls who already had a child at barely twelve;²² or, possibly the child he had in mind was not the offspring of the girl with her. The youngest mother I saw was certainly Iromkré, whose age was between fourteen and fifteen.

OLD AGE

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888 Old people are esteemed; a junior would not venture to address them by name although they were of his own age, but will always apply a kinship term, calling them kedti or ty'ire (grandparent) even if there is no blood relationship. Children and young people never try to converse with their elders unsolicited; even when they have to make some communication to them, they usually remain standing before them in silence until asked to speak. In meeting old people on a narrow path, the younger ones make way to let them pass. I have never heard the frailty of old age derided or mocked. Old Krithí', though already hard of hearing and very myopic, would insist on occasionally going to the creek five to six kilometers beyond the village to try his luck as an angler. On these trips he went astray several times on the numerous trails crisscrossing the steppe and was unable to find his way home. Then his grandsons or great-nephews trotted in his wake like hunting-dogs and jubilantly led him back by the hand.

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889 I have pointed out (p. 94) that after a period of some forty years of athletic life all men of an age class ceremonially and automatically drop out of the sports activities to enter the council, which constitutes the real governing body of the tribe since the chiefs undertake nothing without their advice. Further, I have explained by many illustrations that after any ceremonial retreat a person must present himself to this assemblage before being reckoned a full-fledged member of society again.

²² Snethlage, *Reise*, 463.

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887 this presentation always involving the gift of a gourd bowl of food or of a meat pie. At various other ceremonies the chiefs and elders also get meat pies and other victuals in the plaza.

At the close of the pepyé retreat in 1933 I witnessed a ceremony that publicly and formally expressed the principle that old women merit respect as much as old men. Ordinarily there is no feminine counterpart to the men's council in the plaza; but on that day the old women were invited by the councilors to take the male elders' places in the plaza, the councilors themselves withdrawing to a spot on the margin. Then two youths and a girl hauled in a huge meat pie on a mat and handed it over to the old women, who forthwith divided it up and ate it precisely in the manner of the councilors, whereupon they went home.

Among the Timbira the designation "old woman" or "woman" is never applied to men vituperatively.

BURIAL

764 As stated previously, a Canella, whenever possible, tries to die in his matrilineal home. In 1929 I saw relatives of a very old, sick woman exerting themselves to the utmost in order to get her home alive—an end accomplished only by dashing across the steppe with the patient, who was resting in a makeshift hammock. Several minutes after her arrival she died. In any case a corpse is never laid on a bier except in the maternal home.

763 A dying person is placed on mats in the middle of the house, with his feet toward the door. Except in the case of a prominent figure in the community no one but the next of kin customarily assembles around the patient. A brief lament uttered by his mother, aunt, grandmother, or sister announces his passing away. Thereupon his maternal and paternal kin, as well as his hapín, assemble in the house of mourning, but the general lament by all present does not begin until about an hour later, with the preparation of the corpse, during which all sit round it on mats placed in juxtaposition.

764 The ablutions and ornamentation devolve on the deceased individual's special pinéwé'i or hapín, but other hapín also help. They cut his hair, pluck out his eyebrows, smoothen his features, and put on his decorations. He is painted with urucú or—if a hamrén—decorated with falcon down. The corpses of little children are taken into the nearest relatives' laps (including males) and bewailed. Individual lamentations now begin to swell into a chorus of blubbering and a loud, rapid, monotonous chant: "When you were still alive, I was very fond of you, but now I do not want you any more! Don't return here!" The widow and kinswomen of the deceased may weep themselves into a paroxysm of despair and attempt suicide, especially as the corpse is being carried outdoors. Suddenly seizing a tool or firebrand, the mourner may strike herself a terrific blow over the head or back. Or she may run into the space in front of the house and, precisely like her Guarani and Apinayé sisters,¹ take a header (kamdošép) against the hard ground, possibly breaking her neck. Many years ago a mother, seeing her dead child carried away, is said to have run into the steppe and hanged herself there. Men never commit suicide on this occasion, and generally only the maternal uncle and grandfather are conspicuous in lamentation.

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596 At Konkré's little son's funeral I noted the order in which relatives eat round the corpse: Konkré was at the head, his mother Yátkré and her sister Kentapi at the feet, his wife and one of her sisters on the right side, his mother-in-law and another sister-in-law on the left. A little to one side was seated his father-in-law,

¹ Nimuendajá, *The Apinayé*, 161.